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INTERNATIONAL SECURITY AND SCIENTIFIC AFFAIRS
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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I welcome this opportunity to discuss with you the issues relating to the possible initial use of nuclear weapons. The Department of State shares the concern underlying the proposals which these hearings are considering. We must try to make nuclear war less likely, and do so in ways which preserve this country's security.

I would like to discuss first the reasoning which underlies our policy regarding the initial use of nuclear weapons. The central objective of US strategic nuclear forces is to deter nuclear attack on and nuclear coercion of the US and its Allies. This objective requires as a minimum that these forces, even after absorbing an all-out first strike, be able to inflict an unacceptable level of damage on our enemies. In addition, we must maintain an overall military capability that can meet any level of enemy attack with a deliberate and credible response. Recent improvements

in US strategic forces and in command and control are intended to enhance the flexibility of our forces to meet all these contingencies. Flexibility--that is, the ability to use our forces in a variety of ways--should help to decrease the chance of aggression.

I want to emphasize that this policy in no sense implies that the US is embracing as our national policy the concept of a disarming first strike. By "disarming first strike," I mean an attack designed to deprive a potential enemy of its basic strategic retaliatory capability. We recognize that an attempt to develop a capability for such an attack could be destabilizing in a crisis situation and thus contrary to our best interests. In point of fact, neither we nor the Soviet Union now or foreseeably have the technical means of acquiring a first strike capability. Our strategic arsenal is sufficiently large, flexible, diversified, and survivable so that our basic retaliatory force would survive an enemy first strike. The USSR has the same capacity.

Turning to the question of how best to deter a conventional attack, our reasoning is that the primary defense against such an attack is the conventional capability of the United States allied to the collective or individual conventional capabilities of our partners. Because of the horrors of nuclear warfare, we believe that this must continue to

But this is under-cut, denied, by what follows!

be our policy. We cannot, however, categorically rule out the tactical use of nuclear weapons in response to major non-nuclear aggression if such an attack could not be contained by conventional forces. While such an eventuality may be extremely remote, in situations where our vital interests are at stake, our choice must not be restricted to either holocaust or surrender; rather we must maintain the option for limited use of nuclear weapons to achieve a limited political and military objective.

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I believe this reasoning is valid in a world where nuclear forces exist, where resources for conventional forces are finite, where tensions remain, where countries continue to rely on United States' power to assist in deterring aggression, and where the United States is also dependent on its Allies to mount an adequate level of deterrent force.

Let me now turn from the basic reasoning underlying our position on the use of nuclear weapons to the issues raised by these hearings. I see three specific points which the Congress might address as it considers the various proposals before this Subcommittee. The first and most basic question, of course, is what would be the effect on deterrence and on non-nuclear control of escalation if the US were to renounce the possibility of being the first to use nuclear weapons. It is axiomatic, I would maintain, that US nuclear capability and

the willingness to use it are fundamental factors in deterring the outbreak of war or in deterring the escalation of a war to levels of intensity that could properly be described as a nuclear holocaust. A potential aggressor could interpret an American renunciation of the first use of nuclear weapons as a guarantee that he could use any level of conventional forces without fear of provoking a nuclear response. This interpretation would undermine the implicit escalatory risk which is central to deterring aggression against the United States and its Allies. Moreover, by reducing any enemy's uncertainty, renunciation of first use would greatly simplify his planning and conduct of conventional operations.

I think that we should also consider the effects on our planning of a policy which would limit policy-makers to a choice of either conventional response or possible defeat. One might cynically argue that in the final analysis all bets are off if the United States were faced with an impending defeat, but I think we should recognize that a delay in using a limited number of small-yield nuclear weapons might require the US to plan on using more and larger nuclear weapons later to stave off defeat. Present US defense concepts envisage limited nuclear retaliation if necessary to demonstrate resolve to an attacker, to gain time for renewed diplomatic action to control escalation, or to convince the aggressor

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to restore the status quo. This approach, we believe, does not increase the likelihood of nuclear war but, on the contrary, reduces it by strengthening deterrence and thus reducing the possibility that war will break out in the first place.

A second question is what would be the effect on our Allies of a US renunciation of first use? The security relationships we have with these countries have contributed to the stability of entire regions of the world. The present strategic parity between ourselves and the Soviet Union makes all the more important the maintenance of the collective strength of our alliance systems. In my judgment, if we were to sever the escalatory ladder between conventional defense and strategic retaliation, allied states might doubt US willingness to employ its strategic forces for their defense. The general effect would be to undermine our Allies' faith in our commitments and cause them to question the willingness of the United States to come to their aid against any kind of armed aggression.

A third important question is what would be the effect of a renunciation of first use on the likelihood of nuclear weapons proliferation? I fear that renunciation would raise the question of whether an attack on our Allies would become more likely because potential enemies have been assured that

Allies, allies in other NATO? Note the willingness to distinguish, or limit first-use to NATO!

the US and the Allies would only respond conventionally. Reducing the protection of our nuclear umbrella might cause some near-nuclear weapon states to decide that they could no longer fully rely on us to assist in deterrence and defense and that they should therefore develop their own nuclear weapon capability. I believe that this might also be the case even with the more limited proposal to foreswear first use against non-nuclear weapon states party to the Non-Proliferation Treaty.

A no-first use policy against non-nuclear weapon states party to the NPT is designed, obviously, to encourage wider NPT adherence and enhance the security of NPT parties. The most pressing security concern, however, for many non-nuclear weapon states is often the possibility of conventional armed conflict, probably with neighboring non-nuclear weapon states, and not the activities of the major nuclear powers. To the extent that nuclear weapons are the object of concern in such situations, it is typically, if not invariably, the fear that their neighbors might develop these weapons, thereby upsetting regional power relationships. I question whether a no-first-use policy adopted by the United States would alleviate that type of security concern. I should add that, in my opinion, a limited non-use assurance could be seen by Allies and potential enemies as the opening wedge to the more sweeping non-use

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pledges, and thus at least some of the problems I discussed in association with the broader no-first-use policy could arise with these limited assurances.

Lastly, I would like to stress that I take it as a categorical imperative that the US must strive to minimize and if possible eliminate resort to military force -- both nuclear and conventional. Focusing on only one form of conflict, as these resolutions do, not only distorts the problem but more seriously could even make the other form of warfare - conventional - more likely.

In summary, Mr. Chairman, the Department of State shares the deep desire of the sponsors of these resolutions to find ways of reducing the likelihood of nuclear war and inhibiting the proliferation of nuclear weapons and thereby better to assure a peaceful world that is consistent with our national interests. We constantly strive to reach this goal, but our reasoning has taken us in a different direction than that advocated by the sponsors of these resolutions.